

DIVISION: FORMS 1 - 1VAGE GROUP: 12 plusSERIES: "CURRENT AFFAIRS"PROGRAMME (3) "The Panama Canal"

NARR: Hello Boys and Girls,

In Guyana we're very accustomed to Canals - not big ones of course, but many of them. If you live on or near a Sugar Estate you may often swim in them - or make little boats and sail them there. And of course you often see punts being laden with sugar cane being pulled along them. Yes we're so accustomed to canals we don't even bother to think about them as very exciting things - we take them for granted. And yet, boys and girls, without those canals we'd often have too much water on our Lands when we don't want it and too little water when we do want it. So this net-work of canals really keeps our coastlands working in the right way.

Now, children, there are some very big canals in foreign countries - but they don't do the job of draining lands - they do a much more different job - they link one sea with another.

I'm sure you can give me the names of at least two canals - Yes that is perfectly right - the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal. Both these canals run through little strips of land which divide big Seas or Oceans from each other. If you look on your school maps you'll see that the Suez Canal links the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. Before the Suez Canal was built - a ship sailing from - let's say England to Australia had to go right round the bottom of Africa - a very long journey as you can see.

But let's come nearer home. - let's have a look at the Panama Canal. Well I'm sure you know what two great bodies

/of water this.....

of water this canal links - Yes the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Now just think of for a minute how very useful the Panama Canal is. Suppose you were going on a journey from Georgetown to Australia. Well if there were no Panama Canal you would have to sail across the Atlantic Ocean and around Australia to the eastern coast. But take the Canal route. You would simply sail west from Georgetown along the coast of South America - then through the Canal and straight across the Pacific to Sydney - a much shorter journey. So the Panama Canal is very useful to many countries - But, above all, it is most useful to the United States of America. In fact it was the United States that built the Panama Canal, as long ago as 1904.

But, boys and girls, you must be asking, how did this happen? After all the United States do not own Panama - even in 1904 Panama was an independent country. Just how did the United States come to own the canal that runs through an independent country? Well the people in the United States of America who wanted to build the Canal asked the Government of Panama to let them have the strip of land where they were going to build the Canal. And the Government of Panama said that they would ~~buy keep-to-the-bargain~~ lease the land to the United States for a certain sum of money. And to make sure that each side ^{to} keep/the bargain the two countries signed a treaty - You know what a treaty is - It's a sort of promise made between two countries to keep certain rules and to behave in certain ways.

From that time the strip of land became more or less like a piece of America running across Panama. They set to work to build the Canal - and you know something interesting, boys and girls, many Guyanese and West Indians went to Panama to help build the Canal. It was a difficult job - the land on which the Canal was being built was very unhealthy - full of mosquitoes and all sorts of fevers - but in the end the Canal was finished,

/and ships of.....

and ships of all countries began to sail through this canal.

But of course, children, ships don't sail through the canal free of charge. They've got to pay to pass through. Some of the money, of course, goes to keeping the Canal in good order - some of it too goes to the United States of America as a profit on the Canal. But people in Panama have begun to find that the Government of Panama should have a greater share in the profits of the Canal. Some people think that it's quite wrong for the United States to go on owning a Canal that lies in Panama's territory. Still others would say that the Treaty which gave the Canal zone (as the strip of land is called) - This treaty was made a long time ago and as times change so treaties ought to change too. And many Americans would say that a Treaty is a very important promise and a promise like that should be kept. If the people of Panama want to change this promise then they can only do that if both countries agree to it. So here's a really difficult problem. The Canal is really far too useful to America for her to agree to hand it over to Panama. But the people of Panama feel that they are not masters in their own house - and as you know boys and girls, nowadays most nations like to feel that they control the very important things inside their borders.

One of the interesting things about the world nowadays is that when nations quarrel they often look to a group of nations to patch^{up}/their quarrel. Sometimes they appeal to the United Nations. Sometimes a group of nations in one region form themselves into an association to settle quarrels - and help one another. In the Americas you have the Organization of American States. The O.A.S., as we call it for short. - The general-concern of this organisation is to try to solve peacefully the problems which face countries in the region - Problems which

/ are Social, economical and.....

are Social, economical and political. And by the way the membership of the O.A.S. is made up of the nations of Brazil Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Panama itself, Costa Rica and so on. Most of the Central and South American States. And recently Trinidad and Jamaica applied for membership.

Of course the United States of America is also a member. Panama has asked this Organisation of American States to settle this quarrel over the Canal and see to it that Panama at least gets as much control over the Canal as America. It is going to be a hard job to get both countries to agree on this. But it's a very important matter. For the whole world is watching to see how it will be settled.

The Panama Canal is so important to so many countries that some people have even said it should be handed over to the United Nations. So you see boys and girls, how important these canals are - they are everybody's business and who own them is everybody's ~~general~~ concern.

OPR:

PLAY THEME: